

THE DREADED DEEP END

When I was 10 or 11 years old, I remember my dad taught me how to swim. He taught me how to hold my breath, how to breathe out, and how to coordinate my arms and feet to move myself forward. I was quite good at it. There was only one problem. I was terrified of deep water. I had no problem swimming as long as both of my feet could touch the bottom of the pool. If I couldn't feel the bottom at any point, I panicked.

My dad knew that if I was to truly enjoy swimming, I needed to become confident in deep water. He explained how swimming in the deep end was no different from swimming in the shallow, which only came up to my chest. I'm sure he was right but I had no interest in putting his wisdom to the test. I was content to stay in the shallow end of the pool for life.

I could simply admire those who jumped off the high dive located at the other end of the pool. One day, I walked past the high dive section on the way to my poolside chair. Suddenly from behind me, two hands reached up under my arms, picked me up off the ground, and threw me into the 10' deep end of the pool. I hit the water with a horrific shock. I pushed to the surface to see who had thrown me in. It was my dad. I cried hard. I swam and kicked to the edge with absolute disdain for what my so-called "loving father" had done to me.

As I climbed up the ladder to exit the pool, he smiled and said, "See, it's no different from swimming in shallow water." I didn't care. I stomped off to find my beach blanket and pout.

A couple of days later, our family went to the pool again. I passed by the diving boards and once again, from out of nowhere, the same hands threw me into the deep water. This time when I came to the surface, I was mad. I swam and kicked to the ladder and told my dad to never, ever, EVER do that again.

He had the nerve to just smile at me.

The next several times our family went to the pool, I changed my route of travel from the shallow-end of the pool to my towel. I avoided walking past the deep-end of the pool altogether. I grew paranoid that my dad was always lurking nearby, just waiting to sneak up on me, and cast me into the watery,



bottomless pit of the diving zone.

Several weeks passed and so did my keen awareness of my dad's location at the pool. One day, I inadvertently walked past the deep end of the pool. Suddenly, out of the corner of my eye I saw my dad approaching like a tiger about to pounce on its prey. I knew the inevitable was coming. But this time I wasn't going to give him the satisfaction of throwing me in.

I just jumped into the deep-end before he got to me. My dad smiled at me as I came to the surface. This time I was smiling too. He taught me that sometimes you just have to jump.

This is an excerpt from A Guide to a Life Beyond Imagination by Steven L. Barr, available on Amazon.